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UNCLAS LILONGWE 001110

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/S A. GALANEK
STATE FOR EB/IFD/OMA F. CHISHOLM
STATE FOR EB/IFD/ODF L. SPECHT
STATE PLEASE PASS TO TREASURY/INTL AFFAIRS/AFRICA L. KOHLER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BLANTYRE MAYOR ARRESTED FOR CORRUPTION

REF: LILONGWE 1086

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1. (U) The mayor of Malawi's largest city, Blantyre, has been arrested for corruption, according to unconfirmed newspaper reports. John Chikakwiya, a senior member of the nominally ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) and one of the leading loyalists of former President Bakili Muluzi, is reported as having been arrested Thursday for stealing MK400,000 (\$3,700) in donations targeted for maintaining city streets.

2. (U) Chikakwiya is one of several members of a Muluzi loyalist faction that has been openly critical of President Bingu wa Mutharika's anti-corruption campaign, at least partly out of self-interest. He and several other loyalists (Dumbo Lemani, Kennedy Makwangwala, and Salule Masangwi) held a press conference in late November condemning the arrests of former ministers and other senior UDF members as political persecution. Chikakwiya has been a UDF extremist in the past; upon his (indirect) election as Blantyre's mayor in 2000, he immediately banned all except UDF political demonstrations (though the courts quickly overturned the ban).

3. (SBU) COMMENT: This arrest will doubtless intensify the growing rift between Mutharika's and Muluzi's political factions within the UDF (reftel). Mutharika has arrested several of Muluzi's senior lieutenants in his anti-corruption campaign and shows no signs of letting up. While most observers dismiss the accusations of political persecution, the GOM needs to make its first convictions, rather than more arrests, in order to maintain its popular legitimacy.
GILMOUR